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THE GREAT SHIP  
AND  
RABELAIS REPLIES

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THE GREAT SHIP

*and*

RABELAIS REPLIES

*Two Conversations*

by

ERIC LINKLATER

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## THE GREAT SHIP

FIRST NARRATOR. You are in the Western Desert. Through narrowed eyes you look southward over a stony wilderness. Rough hillocks, edged with rock ; and the desert wind and the driven sand have torn deep gulleys in a near-by hill. There is no colour in the land, nor cloud in the sky ; nothing but the brazen light of the sun.

The floor of the desert is splintered stone, warm to the touch. Here and there, buried in coarse sand, are the roots of a scanty vegetation. Uncover them, and you may find green tendrils. The desert is not wholly without life.

In front of you the land slopes gradually to the south, and among those rocks, that might be outcrop, there is a trench dug in softer ground. There are eight soldiers in the trench. A sentry watches the barren scene ; another has beside him a wireless-telephone set of the kind which the infantry use, and listens intently, wearing the head-phones ; the others sit quietly while their Sergeant is examining his store of grenades.

SECOND NARRATOR. It is the summer of 1942, and the renewed battle between the Eighth Army and Rommel's African Corps has not yet been decided. There is still ebb and flow, thrust and parry, and bitter fighting for the mastery.

Last night, in this sector of the battle, a patrol went out to observe the enemy's movement and harass them if possible. The subaltern in command of it —

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his name is Garrick — left one of his sections in the position you have seen under a Sergeant called Howard ; while he, with the other section, went forward, a mile or more, over that broken ridge southward of the trench, and east of the hill with the gulleys in it.

Until dawn this morning the two sections were in wireless communication with each other. Then from Garrick's party came a message, abruptly broken off, to say that three German tanks which had been harbouring in a wadi were advancing against them. The noise of gun-fire was heard, and the stammer of machine-guns. Then there was silence for an hour, when a voice spoke again, but faintly, from the forward section. Two of them, though deeply wounded, were still alive, it said. Let Sergeant Howard hold his position till nightfall and then, if it was safe to risk it, send out a rescue-party. That was all. But now, at midday, the voice is heard again, hoarse and thin, little more than a whisper.

GARRICK'S VOICE. We are still alive. Do you hear me ? Johnson and I are still alive. We knocked out one of their tanks. Did I tell you that ? Three came at us, and we knocked out one. Do you hear me ? Then stay where you are till darkness. They have an O.P. on that hill with the three gullies showing to the north, the hill to the west. Do not move out of your position by daylight. Do you hear me ? But if things are quiet when darkness comes, then try, if you think it safe, to rescue us. Johnson is wounded in the stomach, and I have a broken leg. The others are dead. But we knocked out one of their tanks first. Hold your ground till it is night. Hold it, Sergeant.

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FIRST NARRATOR. They heard no more, and all that burning afternoon they saw no movement in the desert but the air trembling and dancing in the heat. The sun crossed overhead, and began, with the leisure of insufferable majesty, its slow descent into the west. Blue shadows, darkening to violet, spread tardily over the ground, the sky took on its own colour, and the light was golden. The sun grew larger, nearing the earth, and when it hung no more than a couple of hand-breadths over the horizon, the sentry gave the alarm. From the other side of the claw-marked hill, out of the dazzling glare of the western sky, a pair of tanks were advancing.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Now keep your heads down, and remember what I told you. Nobody's going to fire a shot, and nobody's going to throw a bomb, till I give the word. And I'm not going to give the word till Jerry comes so close we could lean out and kiss him. We're going to hold our fire till it hurts, and I don't want anyone to spoil the plan by getting jumpy and thinking he knows best. I'm the one that knows best, and don't you forget it. How are they coming, sentry ?

SENTRY. About eight hundred yards, Sergeant. Two of them in line ahead, coming slowly, with the sun right behind them.

SERGEANT HOWARD. We've got plenty of time yet, so we'll just run over the instructions for the last time, and make sure that everybody knows his job. Now, Corporal Bardsley and Nixon, you've got the Bren gun : what are your orders ?

BARDSLEY (*in a Lancashire voice, purring with genial confidence*). If one of the enemy's tanks remains behind

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to give covering fire to the other, I shall engage it on receiving your orders, and by rapid fire upset their aim. I shall hold myself in readiness to engage other targets as required. In the event of you being disabled, I shall take command and continue to hold the position.

NIXON (*in the wooden tone of a schoolboy repeating a lesson*). I am Number Two on the gun, and will act as such. If the enemy makes an entry into the trench, I will use my bayonet.

SERGEANT HOWARD. That's right, and you'll have to use it quickly. Now, Marlowe and Williams : you have each got ten sticky bombs. What are you going to do with them ?

MARLOWE (*in the alert but easy voice of a London bus conductor*). On receiving your orders, we both engage the nearest target, if they come one at a time, being careful and accurate with our bombs, and making sure that none are wasted. If the enemy's tanks advance together, then I take the right-hand one, and Williams takes the left.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Right. Now you, Ramsay. You and I have each got a tommy-gun. What do we do ?

RAMSAY (*speaking like a man who has made a serious study of his job*). I do not fire without receiving your order except in the following instance : if any Germans, being within close range, that is within twenty yards, should leave their tanks for any reason whatsoever, I will use my own initiative and engage them as I think best, being careful with my ammunition.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Right. And you, Norris ?

NORRIS (*there is a pause before the answer. His voice is sulky, then rises a little towards defiance*). I don't know.

SERGEANT HOWARD. You don't know ? What the hell do you mean, you don't know ?

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NORRIS. I don't know what's the good of all this. How can we stand up against tanks? You expect us to stay here and get killed for no purpose at all. Why don't we get out while there's time?

SERGEANT HOWARD. Stay where you are, and shut your mouth. Shut up! You'll take my orders, and like them. Pick up your rifle. Pick it up! Now look here, Norris: take a pull at yourself and do your job. Pull yourself together.

NORRIS. I'm only talking common sense! What can half a dozen men do against tanks?

SERGEANT HOWARD. They can do a lot if they make up their minds to it. There's a time for common sense, and a time for uncommon sense, and this is a time for the uncommon sort. . . .

SENTRY. Sergeant!

SERGEANT HOWARD. What is it?

SENTRY. The leading tank has halted about four hundred yards away, and the other's heading eastward, travelling fast. It's still going east, still going east. It's turning towards us, it's advancing. It's coming more slowly now. Now it's halted, and the first one's advancing again. It's coming on slowly. Three hundred yards . . .

SERGEANT HOWARD. Now keep cool, and we'll be all right. Norris, you stay beside me. Everything satisfactory at your end, Corporal Bardsley?

BARDSLEY. Champion, Sergeant. I've had tooth-ache since yesterday dinner-time, but it's stopped now.

SENTRY. Two hundred . . .

SERGEANT HOWARD. We want to do a bit better than Mr. Garrick's section, that's what we're aiming at. They got one, and we're going to get a couple.

SENTRY. One hundred, and it's stopping. Look out!

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*The thin parabolic whistle of a shell is followed by its shattering cough, and the SENTRY's voice, when next he speaks, is shrill and high.*

SENTRY. That was the other tank, Sergeant. The one to the east'ard.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Steady, boys. This won't do you any harm if you keep your heads down.

*The shriek and explosion of shell after shell : five or six of them. There is an interval of several seconds between each explosion, so that the echoes of one have almost died away before the crescendo whine of the next is heard. Then come four or five bursts of machine-gun fire ; traversing with a deadly dry staccato rattle. There is silence for a moment, but then a new sound strikes the ear : the engine-noise and rumbling tread of an approaching tank.*

SERGEANT HOWARD. Anybody hurt ? — No, I told you it wouldn't do any harm.

SENTRY. Sixty yards away, Sergeant. Still coming at walking-pace.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Get ready, Marlowe and Williams. Stand by, Ramsay.

SENTRY. Thirty yards, twenty-five . . .

SERGEANT HOWARD. All right, let 'em have it, and for your own sake don't waste a bomb.

*As the grumbling roar of the tank comes so near that you feel it is almost overhead, there is the thudding noise of several small explosions. The tank stops, and two more explosions are very clearly heard. Then comes the SERGEANT's voice, and now for the first time he is excited.*

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SERGEANT HOWARD. Watch for them, Ramsay. We'll roast 'em out now. There's one — he's yours !

*The SERGEANT and RAMSAY fire their tommy-guns : there are three short bursts and one long one. Then a machine-gun opens fire from the distance, there is the dry whine of bullets passing narrowly overhead, the SER-GEANT's voice is heard as he shouts another order.*

SERGEANT HOWARD. Got him, Ramsay ? That's the last of them. . . . Now Bardsley, the other tank. Let 'em have it !

CORPORAL BARDSLEY *goes into action with his Bren.*

FIRST NARRATOR. The nose of the disabled tank is no more than a yard or two from the trench. The adhesive bombs are still burning on its steel skin, and in half a dozen places the grey metal glows with a dull red heat. The crew, desperate to escape from the furnace of the interior, were shot as they came out through their armoured hatches. The tank commander, his legs still in the turret, hangs like a half-open jack-knife, and above the dead driver, sprawling over the bows, there is a little spiral, pale in the sunlight, of blue smoke. His left arm lies across one of the burning stains on the armour, and his overalls have caught fire.

SECOND NARRATOR. In the trench a hard exultation has replaced the tautly muscled anxiety with which the men had waited for the attack. Their voices are loud, and after many hours of slow and cautious movement, their gestures have become expansive. There is no trace of pity on their faces. Some are ridged with laughter, others are swiftly mobile in their flood of

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speech. But Williams, a moon-faced boy of twenty, wears a look of bewilderment, or incredulity, and now, as though with a strange and secret pleasure, he smiles, and now, for no reason that he could explain, wipes with the dirty back of his hand a tear from his eye. The Sentry is still watching his front, and Sergeant Howard, with a brave pretence that nothing out of the ordinary has occurred, is already checking his remaining store of bombs and ammunition. Then the Sentry calls.

SENTRY. The other sod's begun to move, Sergeant. He's advancing now.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Well, we're ready for him. Same tactics as before, and everyone has the same duties. You did a good job last time, and if you do it again we'll have another nice fat tank in the bag in ten minutes' time.

SENTRY. Heads down !

*The tank fires three shells in succession. They fly low above the trench and burst behind it.*

SERGEANT HOWARD. Is everybody all right ? — What's the matter with you, Williams ?

WILLIAMS. Not again, Sergeant ! I can't do it again ! It's the waiting, it's the sitting and waiting for it I can't do.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Of course you can, Williams. You're all right. Tell yourself you're going to stick it, boy.

WILLIAMS. I've only got four bombs left : I'm frightened I miss. I can't do it !

SERGEANT HOWARD. What about you, Norris ?

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NORRIS. I'll take over from him. I'll throw his bombs.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Good man, Norris. You sit down and keep quiet, Williams. All you need's a bit of a rest. Go and take charge of that wireless set, and try to get Mr. Garrick's section again.

SENTRY. Two hundred yards, Sergeant, but he's coming very slowly, and stopping every now and then.

SERGEANT HOWARD. We'll stop him when the time comes. All correct at your end, Corporal Bardsley?

BARDSLEY. Champion, Sergeant. If I could get a couple of tanks a day, I wouldn't ever have to go to the dentist.

WILLIAMS. Sergeant! Sergeant!

SERGEANT HOWARD. Now what's the matter with you, Williams? I've been patient with you so far, but don't try to spoil my temper...

WILLIAMS. There's someone talking, and it isn't Mr. Garrick, it isn't Johnson. I don't know who it is.

SENTRY. About a hundred and fifty, and he's stopped again.

WILLIAMS. It's someone with the other section, but he's talking queer. I don't know what he means. It isn't anyone I've ever heard before.

SERGEANT HOWARD. Give me the phones.

*The SERGEANT holds one of the ear-pieces to his and hears, amid a slight crackling, the voice of a stranger. It is hoarse but clear, the voice of a man speaking with fearful difficulty, but impelled by a fanatical wild faith to deliver his message.*

Nothing shall prevent us. We do not yield, nor take our rest. We must find what we seek, and make what

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is our purpose to make. Let every man serve with all his strength, a full heart, and the skill of his mind. This is the War of Peace, in which we do not fight for glory or dominion, but fair weather to continue our voyage, and our victory shall be the harbour to a land where men will seek the happiness of truth as though it were the gold of Manoa. Keep safe your great ship, look to your cordage and the guns, and hold your course. We are the voyagers, and the war is the War of Peace. Now in that faith, and in God's name —fight !

*Again the air is divided by the shrill descending cry of a shell and its sudden explosion. More shells explode about the trench, but then the battle noise fades, and the voice of a NARRATOR is heard.*

FIRST NARRATOR. Three days ago, nearly eighty miles from here, in the desert to the south-west, two of our armoured cars on distant patrol were surprised by the enemy's dive-bombers, and both were hit. One was a total loss and none of its crew survived. From the other car, two men came out alive : Lieutenant Grenfell, in command of the patrol, and Corporal Scott. Grenfell was burnt about the head and Scott wounded in the left arm. When night fell they set their course, east-north-east, and began to march. They marched all night, keeping a steady pace, and before sunrise they came to a small wadi that would give them some shelter from the heat of the day.

GRENFELL. A very handsome, commodious, and excellent wadi. Our luck is holding, Scott. We shall spend the day in comfort, and when night falls, continue the anabasis with vigour. How are you feeling ?

SCOTT. I'm all right, sir, thank you.

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GRENFELL. Is your arm comfortable? Poor Talbot's shirt makes a good sling, but I wish we had had something to splint it. Is the bone rubbing?

SCOTT. You did a right good job with the bandages and it might be a lot worse. But that cloot I tied on your head's coming loose. You'll need to let me sort it.

GRENFELL. Then for pity's sake have tender fingers. . . . Aah! You're worse than a travelling dentist.

SCOTT. Is it just the burn, or is your head aching?

GRENFELL. A trifle or so. The piston rings are loose, you could fry an egg on the cylinder heads, and there's gravel in the gear-box. But apart from that, a mere nothing of inconvenience. Nothing but a little pain, which prevents me, now and then, from thinking about breakfast. What shall we have this morning, Scott: grapefruit or a melon? Give me two or three kidneys with my bacon and tomatoes, a few crusty rolls, the Oxford marmalade, and a quart of coffee.

SCOTT. There's two packets of biscuits, one tin of bully, and thank God my water-bottle's full.

GRENFELL. Then we shall make austerity our choice and pretend that we are sparrows. Divide two packets of biscuit by an estimated three nights of marching, and what's the answer?

SCOTT. There's the ration, sir, and as soon as you've eaten it you ought to get some sleep before the sun's too high.

GRENFELL. No, not yet. I'm not sleepy yet. I want to look at the abomination of the desert first; and curse it. Then sleep and dream of orchards, late primroses in a deep valley, and the river going through. Have you seen my part of England, Scott? Have you ever been in Devonshire?

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SCOTT. I took my summer holiday there once. You see, my uncle died, he was my mother's brother — but you'll not be interested in the reason.

GRENFELL. I am devoutly interested in reason. Show me an effect, and like a passionate pilgrim I seek the cause immediately.

SCOTT. Well, it was this way. My uncle was a great reader, you see, and when he died he left me all his books. He had more than three hundred, enough for a lifetime, and I began to read them on the day after the funeral. It would be two or three months — they were all interesting — before I came to the eight volumes of Hakluyt : *Hakluyt's Voyages and Discoveries*. There was real pleasure in them, Mr. Grenfell. They're full of meat, just full of it. And when I'd finished them I wanted to see what sort of a country it was where so many of the Elizabethan ships had been built, and the seamen bred. There was a big number of them were Devonshire men. So I took my summer holiday there, to look at the ground.

GRENFELL. There's land that grows wheat, and land that feeds beef, and some that bears nothing but bracken. There's land that breeds men, seamen and good men, and land that gives suck to wet-legs and weaklings. If our masters of the Government would realise that, and learn that the soil goes into a man's heart as well as into turnips, they might take more care of the land and breed a better citizen. But Devonshire is good : you thought so, didn't you ? Devonshire gave Queen Elizabeth what she needed, and Elizabeth was hard to satisfy.

SCOTT. It's a rich country, and the lie of it's as bonny as a man could wish to see. But much of it, for my liking, is just a thought too warm and comfortable.

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Where I come from the hills are broad and bare, and the winter's hard enough to give them a memorable look. A look of dignity, of cold unfriendly dignity. It's good for a man to be reminded of that side of nature, and in the desert it's a positive luxury to think of winter in Scotland.

GRENFELL. Why not think of the frosty Caucasus ? But where's your village ?

SCOTT. I work in Edinburgh, but I was born in Melrose, in Roxburghshire. Under the Eildon Hills, where King Arthur, as they say, lies buried with his Court.

GRENFELL. Arthur ? Arthur, if he ever lived, was whisked away to die in Avalon, in the latitude of noble whimsy. King Arthur was a solar myth, and his Round Table was made of the same wood as Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

SCOTT. That's maybe true enough, though if there never was such a man, it's a strange thing he should be buried under the Eildon Hills. What are you girming at ? Is your head feeling worse ?

GRENFELL. There's carbon in the cylinder, the engine's knocking. Carbon, the source of life, is a deadly foe to machinery. Remember that, Scott. There's a moral in it.

SCOTT. Moral or no, it's time you were trying to sleep. Now just you lie down, and stop thinking. You keep your mind quiet for a while. No, not there. There's a better place here, the ground's softer. . . .

FIRST NARRATOR. The shadows of the rocks grow shorter, the glare of the rising sun bleaches the sky, and the surface of the desert trembles in the heat. Under a sky of brass the stony floor burns like the

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level coals in a brazier, and the air dances above it. During the middle hours of the day there is no shade in the wadi. Grenfell and Scott, who had been sleeping under its eastern bank, were wakened when light poured over. They sit without speaking, as though in that stagnant heat the weight of the sun had closed their lips. They doze a little, but feverishly, and wake with the torment of their wounds, or take fright at their dreams and turn eagerly to look at the western bank of the wadi, hoping to see a shadow come creeping down. At last, in the late afternoon, as though a dry pool were filling with the returning tide, the shadow comes. They stumble across the bed of the wadi, lie down, and sleep more easily for an hour or more.

SECOND NARRATOR. Scott is the first to wake, but he does not rouse Grenfell till the sun is down. Then in turn they swallow a single mouthful of water, eat a biscuit apiece, and a morsel of bully beef. They climb out of the wadi and begin, slowly at first and apparently with reluctance, their second night's march. The surface of the desert is still hot, but the air grows cooler and before the short twilight goes they are walking steadily. When darkness comes, and the first stars appear, they halt and check their course. Till now they have hardly spoken, and Grenfell was walking fifty yards ahead of Scott. But now they walk side by side.

GRENFELL. So King Arthur, according to you, is buried under the Eildon Hills, on the Scottish border?

SCOTT. That's what we were told as bairns.—I think I'd better walk on your other side, and then there'll be no fear of you jogging this arm of mine.

GRENFELL. Is it more uncomfortable?

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SCOTT. It's better in one way, and worse in another. The pain's not near so bad, but it's tender to the touch and heavier in the sling. How's your head, sir?

GRENFELL. Better, better, a lot better. — Did it ever occur to you, Scott, that the story of Arthur, who never lived, is the most wide-spread and toughly persistent of all the stories born in Britain? There was a man called Wace, who translated Geoffrey of Monmouth, and according to him the story was neither truth nor tarra-diddle, neither a fable of pure imagination nor solid history. It was a living tale, it was always growing. It was told in the eighth century, and Tennyson told it to the Victorians. It was alive in all the centuries between. And why did it live? Because it became a story of men looking for something. The knights who never were, rose from a table never built, to go in search of what all good men desire, but none has ever seen. And that is neither false nor true, neither wholly a fact, nor altogether a fairy tale.

SCOTT. There's always been a kind of restlessness in us, both Scots and English. I often wondered, when I was reading Hakluyt, what it was that made Hawkins and the Gilberts and John Davis go to sea. Just greed and rapacity, I thought to begin with. But there was more in it than that, for a lot of the voyages were fair disastrous, and even on the average the men might have done better to bide at home. And after I'd seen Devonshire I wondered still more, for to say goodbye to the comfort of those green valleys and the wee towns by the rivers, and go to sea in the little tumbling ships, in the sour and stinking ships of their time, was a very desperate thing to do. But they couldn't rest, Mr. Grenfell. They were always looking for a North-West Passage, and a North-East Passage, and virgin soil.

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GRENFELL. And Manoa the Golden. Raleigh went to look for Manoa. But Manoa was more than gold, Manoa was a dream, and he knew it. Dream or vision, fantasy or faith or idea. As a people, Scott, as a nation, we're bogged down in Saxon clay and Norman greed and Keltic sloth, but there are always some of us who breed ideas, Scott, and when we climb out of the mud and follow them, we make history, Scott, we grow better than we thought, we find our strength. There's flint in the Saxon clay and a pearl in your Keltic sloth, and the Normans were great builders.

SCOTT. That's all very true, but if you'll stop for a minute and look at your compass, you'll see that we've gone away from our course ; or else the stars have shifted. That's no' the star that was in front of us half an hour ago.

GRENFELL. Fifty-four, fifty-five : we're east of our line. It's the slope of the ground that's done it, or the zest of talking, or my head's going round. The engine's racing again, Scott. Thank God there's no madness in my family, we're not prone to lunacy, we solid men of Devon — until we see Manoa in the sky. Did I speak of Manoa before ?

SCOTT. You did, sir.

GRENFELL. Why do you call me *sir* ? Am I talking too much ?

SCOTT. It has all been very interesting, sir.

GRENFELL. In the ordinary circumstances of life, in the normal channel of my daily existence, Corporal Scott, I am not in the habit of talking about King Arthur.

SCOTT. If you consider it that way, it's very seldom that I talk about Frobisher and Sir Francis Drake in my daily business. I'm a bootmaker, and the subject

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of Elizabethan voyaging doesn't often seem to arise.

GRENFELL. So we are both guilty of eccentricity, and the stars are witness to it. We have gone off our course and perhaps we are going mad. Has the possibility of that occurred to you, Corporal Scott ?

SCOTT. No, sir.

GRENFELL. Why not ?

SCOTT. Because we're just as likely to be going sane. But we'll need to bear a little more to the left.

GRENFELL. Bear to the left, you say ? Are you talking parables, Scott ? Are you preaching politics now ?

SCOTT. No, no, not that at all, sir. Just you look on your compass and leave politics alone till we get home again. . . .

FIRST NARRATOR. When it was nearly midnight they lay down and slept for an hour or two. Then rose and marched again. Here and there the desert was broken by outcrop, traversed by sharp-edged ribs of rock, but over long open stretches there was no obstacle greater than little heaps or humps of stone, like a field pimpled with mole-hills.

SECOND NARRATOR. The star-lit sky surrounded them. Walking a rising slope they felt as though they were forcing their way into the great herd of stars moving and grazing on the dark prairie above. The desert showed itself in black outline. Here, on the left, were two hills like enormous waves with the wind behind them : there, on the right, was a line of cliff that turned to the south and tempted them to follow. When the ground fell, and they walked faster, it seemed as though the stars had gathered behind, and were pursuing them. They looked over their shoulders and

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saw the bright herd charging, a stampede of the planets.

FIRST NARRATOR. The sky grew pale, and a mile away they could see the shadow of an escarpment. They turned towards it. The face of it, brick-red, was like a ruined colonnade. The molten edge of the sun rose above the shoulder of the earth, and they lay down to rest. Each of them drank a single mouthful of water. The remaining fragment of bully beef was stinking, but they ate hungrily. They hardly spoke, and presently, in a patch of shade, fell into exhausted sleep.

SECOND NARRATOR. Another day begins. The doors of the furnace are open. Hour follows hour in a slow procession of increasing torment. Under the red cliff, Scott has wakened in a burning fever. His brain is bewildered in the agony of his broken arm, and he is tortured by thirst. His water-bottle, still half full, is behind him. He sits up and reaches for it with a shaking hand. He holds it for a long minute, then rises, and stumbling towards Grenfell, wakes him roughly.

GRENFELL. Poison ! I'll not drink it.

SCOTT. Take this and keep it. I'm not to be trusted with it.

GRENFELL. I thought it was a dream.

SCOTT. Take the water-bottle.

GRENFELL. I was dreaming of hell, and I thought it was only a dream. How we delude ourselves ! And what's the matter with you, Peter Scott of Melrose in the graveyard of King Arthur ?

SCOTT. Take the water-bottle, I tell you. I'm that crazy with thirst I canna thole it. I canna thole it.

GRENFELL. Your fever's come, and there's no comfort in saying it was bound to come. The bottle's half full : take a swig of it.

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SCOTT. I'm not due a drink for another two hours.

GRENFELL. Wet your mouth and swallow a spoonful. Open your mouth, you fool ; a hen would drink more than that.

SCOTT. You're tempting me.

GRENFELL. Take another sip. Take it, or I'll crime you, you old dry root of parsimony. Has it kept its flavour ?

SCOTT. The springs of Paradise were never sweeter.

GRENFELL. Think of the dolts and miscreants at home who pull the plug from their bath, and let water go to waste. God, what scoundrels men are !

SCOTT. Did you ever see Edinburgh when the wind's in the east, and the sky black with cloud, and the whole town's droukit with rain, and every gutter running like a burn in spate ? All the cassie stones shining-wet, and waterfalls coming down the Castle Rock, and the roofs of the houses dancing for joy, and the wind howling for more. It's a grand sight, Edinburgh in the rain, and if I could lay my tongue to it I'd leave it as dry as Babylon ruined in the sand.

GRENFELL. If you were to lay me down by the New Bridge on Dartmoor I could stretch my mouth so wide it would swallow the whole river and not a trickle would ever reach the sea. The sea's a drunkard, and should be cured. Let you and I, when the war's over, drink all the rivers dry, to cure the sea of vice. Can you think of better employment ?

SCOTT. I'm a shoemaker by trade, Mr. Grenfell. I used to work in Edinburgh, in a shop on Princes Street. Did I ever tell you that ? And every day, on my way to work, I'd go down a street called St. David Street, and have a good laugh to myself when I read the name of it. For it wasna christened after a saint at all, but Davie

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Hume the atheist. A great man with the bottle, they say.

GRENFELL. It was David Hume who wrote — but I forgot how the words run — that when he looked outward he saw little but anger, lies, and disputing ; and when he looked inward, at himself, nothing but ignorance and doubt. A very valiant diagnosis.

SCOTT. He must have been brave enough, for it wouldna be a coward that would set himself up as a heretic in Scotland at that time in history. But Davie had his own ideas. Davie, in his own way, was like those Devonshire seamen of yours. He was aye making discoveries, or trying to. There's a book of his called the *Treatise of Human Nature*. It was one of the books I got from my uncle, and none of the easiest, I can tell you. It fair beat me, that one. But there's no denying it's an Elizabethan voyage to explore human nature. You need to be prepared for disappointment. You'll warp and handle your ship through the Straits of Magellan, hoping for a fair breeze that'll take you out of the cold airs into the trade route of the treasure ships and the latitude of the spice islands, but more than likely the wind blows contrary, and down you drive to the far south, to the great fields of ice, a white and hostile region full of fear. There's a fell Antarctic region in the human soul, a cold place of enmity and fear. Were you ever just desperately afraid, Mr. Grenfell ?

GRENFELL. Look at the desert. Look at the air dancing like a troop of yellow idiots, and the glare of death on dead earth, and the scope of nothingness. I'm so full of fear, at this moment, I could howl like a mad dog and run round in circles.

SCOTT. That's natural fear, that is part and parcel of

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the universe, but the other kind, the man-made fear, is harder to bear. You can be feared of time and space, and feel no belittlement. But to be helpless and afraid in the man-made world is like a disease that both weakens you and leaves you sore ashamed. . .

*His voice fades into silence, and faintly in the distance  
the noise of gun-fire is heard.*

FIRST NARRATOR. You are travelling westward through space and forward in time. You are returning to the outpost in the desert where Sergeant Howard and his few men are fighting against the German tanks. The first of them, a ruin of steel, is dead and still. The second, lurching slowly forward, is about fifteen yards from the trench. Its gun cannot be depressed to fire into the trench, but when the gunner fires again, the blast of the explosion bellows like an Atlantic wave on the rocky parapet. Norris and Marlowe, the bomb-throwers, rise from the ground, and now, as if it were audible as speech, you hear, in Norris's mind, the current of his thought.

NORRIS. Now quickly now and down again. No not quickly but careful and that's where it goes and for God's sake don't miss it again. Another like that. We can do nothing to stop them, but I'm not frightened now. I was, and how could I help it, when I had lived so long with fear? Fear of decay, and a world with no meaning in it. Three jobs in five years, that was all I had, and one of them lasted six months, that was the longest. Five years of helplessness and fear, and angry women in the house. And no one to show us a way out of the trap. How could I help being afraid? Since I

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could think for myself I had never known a thought that was confident about anything at all. But steady now, now it's burning, now another like that, and it sticks too. And Williams, he was about the same. He was all right to begin with, and then he cracked.

WILLIAMS. I am like the house my father built, and couldn't pay for. There is no permanence in me, I do not own myself. There was neither foundation nor security in my life. When the people had no work, because there was no one to buy their work, they couldn't pay their bills, and my father couldn't pay for the house, and we were turned out of it. It was a poor house, ugly and draughty and thin, but we were turned out of it after paying for three years, and they took back the furniture, and I had to leave school and go to work in a job that meant nothing to any human soul. I began well, but I was broken, I broke early, because nothing lasts, nothing I have ever seen is capable of standing square to the winds and defying their strength. In my life at home I saw nothing that was steadfast and whole. I had no example. . .

SECOND NARRATOR. In their third night of marching, both Grenfell and Scott, when they began to walk, were slow as sleep-walkers in a long corridor, moving as if through a dream with fumbling steps. The fortitude of their minds, like a slave-master without pity, drove their bodies forward. Then the habit of strength returned to their legs, and they went more quickly, with more assurance. But after midnight, still marching, the fever of their wounds perplexed them, and twice they lost each other. The multitude of the stars oppressed them.

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GRENFELL. Where did we go astray ?

SCOTT. I gave a look round, and you were gone. And when I saw you again you were standing with your hands out, like a man feeling the rain.

GRENFELL. I felt the downpour of the sky.

SCOTT. Let me see the compass.

GRENFELL. It's no good. I knew it had gone wrong when it led us off the beach. Don't you realise what has happened ? It led us off the beach, and now we are under the sea, Scott. Under a shallow sea. Look at the roof : it's leaking like a herring-net, like a net lifting from the sea, heavy with fish, and the silver and the water running out.

SCOTT. Stop that kind of talk, or you'll go daft indeed.

GRENFELL. Don't you think it a charming fancy ? The sky's a herring-net, and the silver comes drenching through. But you're a dull fellow, Scott. You have no imagination.

SCOTT. Can you lend me some of yours ? Enough to imagine myself in comfort ? My arm's lifting like a fire-balloon, hauling me to the sky and burning as we go. Then it bursts and comes down again, and hangs round my neck like a dead hind.

GRENFELL. A hind ? You know the drag of a dead hind on your shoulder ? So you're a poacher too ?

SCOTT. It's no great sin.

GRENFELL. You're a deer-stealer, are you ?

SCOTT. My mother came from the Highlands, from the parts above Lochalsh, and her eldest brother has the farm there still. I used to go up in the back-end, and it did no harm, at that time of year, to take a hind or two. A country with few folk in it, and streams and waterfalls on every hill. There was a cousin of mine,

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that was Alec, the younger of the two, a fine shot with a rifle and a grand piper. Many's the hind we carried home in the dark, and the old man would bring out his bottle, and we'd sit down to supper, and then to a night of piping, for the old man played too. But Alec was his master. I was there at Christmas, two and a half years ago, when Alec and me had our leave at the same time. He had learnt a new pibroch called *The War of Peace*. A fine tune, and he played it well. He was killed at St. Valery, was Alec.

GRENFELL. *The War of Peace*.

SCOTT. That was the name of it. It's a McCrimmon pibroch.

GRENFELL. *The War of Peace*. . . . You have no imagination, Scott, no imagination whatsoever. We have lived in this infernal desert together for more than a year, and you have never told me about the War of Peace. Why not? Because you lack imagination, you do not see what it means.

SCOTT. I only heard it the once.

GRENFELL. You see nothing, you cannot even see that the sky's a herring-net, pouring silver. The crystal sea is drenching through, ten million fountains starting from the roof, and you may drown in liquid light, but you won't believe it. How shall I convince you? If I take off my clothes, here, now, and swim, will that compel you to admit that I know best?

SCOTT. Dinna be daft, man.

GRENFELL. Corporal Scott!

SCOTT. Sir.

GRENFELL. Take my shirt. Carry my trousers.

SCOTT (*in great distress*). Though you're daft yourself, dinna drive me daft too. We're lost in this god-forsaken desert, but if we keep our wits we'll win out of it some

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gate. But if you lose your mind, we'll be altogether lost. Give me your hand and let me hold it. Hold hard. Put that play-acting out of your mind, and be your own self.

GRENFELL. There, there, Scott. I was only testing you. Testing my voice, cutting a fancy, something of the kind.

SCOTT. Put on your shirt and breeks.

GRENFELL. Of course I shall, if that will comfort you.

SCOTT. We'll go no further till you've had a rest. We'll stay here and get some sleep.

GRENFELL. Here? With a stone for my pillow and a two-foot ledge of rock for the wall behind?

SCOTT. We'll find nothing better.

GRENFELL. Then pray heaven we dream of nothing worse.

FIRST NARRATOR. They sleep, or fall into a trance of exhaustion, and do not wake till the sun has risen. It comes nakedly into the sky. Not veiled in the soft light of an English morning, but arrogant and bare, a rim of burning brass rising swiftly over the horizon. Grenfell sits up. He is a forlorn and tragic figure, with his thickly bandaged head, his manifest weakness, the scrub of beard on his haggard face. But he seems to have recovered from his delirium, and his voice, though faint and breaking, is calm enough.

SECOND NARRATOR. Scott, sleeping still, lies like a dead man. Like an Eastern beggar dead on a pavement. Grenfell can hardly rouse him, and when his eyes, unwillingly, open at last, he shows no understanding, and for a few minutes he cannot speak.

GRENFELL. We must go on. We can't stay here all

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day. We're in the middle of the frying-pan here, we must look for shelter and shadow.

SCOTT. There is none.

GRENFELL. The desert is more broken further on. We shall find a better place than this. Get up, Scott. Let us make a start before the sun is high.

SCOTT. Is there any water?

GRENFELL. We finished it last night.

SCOTT. That was my fault. I had more than my share yesterday.

GRENFELL. There's no profit in arguing about that now. Get up and march, Scott!

SCOTT. Would it no' be as easy to stay and die here?

GRENFELL. We're not going to die. We're going to march.

SCOTT. I canna rise. The arm lies on me like a man that's been killed.

GRENFELL. Give me your hand.

FIRST NARRATOR. Slowly, with infinite weariness, and every movement pain, they stumble forward against the sun. Already above the desert, close to the ground, the air is a shimmer of heat. The ground rises, very gradually, to a long ridge, and there, from the height of it they see, no more than a mile or two away, a small hill with a broken rocky face. They turn towards it and walk more strongly, with purpose in their gait.

SECOND NARRATOR. Slowly they approach the little hill. The shape of it is curved, like a sleeping dog, and the short side has broken to leave a roughly channelled cliff. But the rocks that were dark with shadow are growing pale and bright. Like water in the sand, the shadows vanish, dried by the sun. But now, beyond the cliff, there is a new thing to be seen. A shape on the

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desert, familiar though distorted, and they stop and stare at it, then hurry forward, excited now and almost running. A Spitfire, shot down in battle, lies on the stony ground, leaning awkwardly on a broken wing.

SCOTT. There's no sign of the pilot.

GRENFELL. There's his parachute. He got out alive, and took to his feet.

SCOTT. Then he's not likely to have left anything behind that's going to be much use to us.

GRENFELL. There's blood in the cockpit. He was wounded.

SCOTT. What's that on the floor ?

GRENFELL. It is ! By God, it's a water-bottle. . . . Yes, it's a water-bottle.

SCOTT. What's the matter ? Can you no' reach it ?

GRENFELL. Yes.

SCOTT. Is it full ?

GRENFELL. Look.

SCOTT. A bullet through it. They put a bullet through a water-bottle, and who did they shoot ? You and me.

GRENFELL. We're better-off than we were. We can sit in the shadow of the wing : that's luxury against the open desert.

SCOTT. Ay, we've got shadow, but no substance.

GRENFELL. There's more blood here. That poor devil of a pilot was hard hit.

SCOTT. Do you see something like a rock over there ? Maybe six hundred yards away. No. More to the left.

GRENFELL. A rock. It's only a rock. But there's a hundred rocks, a hundred at least.

SCOTT. It's maybe him. I'll take a walk over and see.

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GRENFELL. You're wasting your time. It's only a rock, if anything at all. But is it? It's gone now, I can see nothing. That's not a rock, because it's moving. Do you see a file of men, Scott, with each of them a burden on his shoulder? Where are you going?

SCOTT. I'll no' be long. You sit here and wait.

*He walks away from the aeroplane, in the direction of the rock, or the man, that he has seen in the desert.*

GRENFELL. Not again, pray God not again. They're beginning to move, but I mustn't look at them. Lie down and hold the earth, shut eyes, shut out the light. Hold firm, no panic now. The war is to be won, the War of Peace . . .

*In the shadow of the wing he lies prone, his arm wide-spread, his fingers, tremulous, digging into the stony soil. Presently SCOTT returns.*

SCOTT. Mr. Grenfell. Mr. Grenfell!

GRENFELL. Was it a rock?

SCOTT. No, it was the pilot. Here, take a drink of this tea.

GRENFELL. Did he give you that?

SCOTT. He doesna need it.

GRENFELL. Dead?

SCOTT. It's a miracle how he got so far. A big swack fellow with a moustache the colour of tow. He had this flask in his hand, and he'd fallen forward. He was lying on it, and I didna see it till I lifted him.

GRENFELL. You're sure he's dead?

SCOTT. It must have been yesterday.

GRENFELL. A pint of cold tea. That was the estate

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he left, and many a man has left a poorer heritage. If I drink more I shall be as drunk as my coming-of-age.

SCOTT. I havena tasted it yet.

GRENFELL. Take it, then. Drink and rejoice, praise God and salute all pilots.

SCOTT. A swack fellow with a big, fair moustache. Ay, it's good tea. Man, it's the best I ever tasted !

FIRST NARRATOR. Under the wing of the fallen aeroplane they have a little shelter from the noonday sun, but the glaring desert surrounds them, and the light is baleful. The dead pilot's tea has revived them, and both are restless, almost with the vitality of convalescence. Neither can sleep, but they do not talk, for both are busy with their own thoughts. Then in the early afternoon, when the heat is worst and the light shimmers like oil on water, Grenfell, with mounting excitement, begins to mutter.

GRENFELL. Look, Scott ! They are moving faster now, they are about to charge. That wave racing ashore : that is the knees of the horses.

SCOTT. Is that so ?

GRENFELL. Do you not see them ? Look. They are all in armour, with banners and pennants and guidons, the light flashing from shield and corselet and the furniture of their chargers.

SCOTT. If you look over there, you'll see something like a walled city, and the river running beside. But you needn't believe what you see.

GRENFELL. But it is ! They are the towers of Camelot. And the knight so gently pacing by the river-bank, who's he ? *The helmet and the helmet-feather burned in one perfect flame together, as he rode down to Camelot.* There's

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immortality in the air. We are beyond the barrier now, we're in the presence of King Arthur and his chivalry.

SCOTT. We're in the presence of a mirage, and well you know it. You've seen plenty of them in the last twelve months.

GRENFELL. But they are changing shape. The banners and the pennants have become the topmost sails of a little fleet of ships, and the lifting knees and the breaking manes of the horses are now like the waves of a great sea. What little ships to cross so large an ocean ! Are they Raleigh and his fleet, in search of Manoa, or the *Golden Hind* and her consorts putting an English girdle round the earth ? Some company, perhaps, making sail to join Lord Howard and defeat the Great Armada ; or Frobisher searching for the Arctic passage, Cook charting the Antipodes, or Indiamen running their easting down — who are they, Scott ?

SCOTT. Keep calm, keep calm. They'll all disappear when the sun goes down.

GRENFELL. You think I'm a fool, Scott, but perhaps I can see more than you. Perhaps my eyes are better. Look now ! I was wrong, Scott, I was wrong. They are not a fleet of ships, but one great ship, crowded with canvas, and the waves at the bow are reaching up to fondle and caress her bulwarks. You know her now, there is no mistaking her now. You see the bulwarks ? You may think, perhaps, they are more like cliffs ? And so they are. They are the cliffs that rise above the Atlantic from Shetland to the Land's End, and all her sails are the clouds of our own country. That great mainsail now, covering the midland shires : heavy canvas, and it looks like rain. And snow-clouds fill upon the mizen-yard. But you mark her high top-gallant-sails ? They are the little clouds you see above

## *The Great Ship*

the Downs, above the Yorkshire moors, on a fine day : and higher reaching still, her lofty stunsails, are the feathered sky above our western counties. They serve her well, those great sails, and her best point is always to windward. Many a time has she clawed her way off a lee-shore when all the world thought her a total loss. But see the company upon the decks ! Was ever ship so manned, in all history, with the good people of our race, our mariners and yeomen, mechanics and philosophers, with the Admirals of England and poets whose very names are a choir of music ? O reprehensible and lovely ship !

. SCOTT (*in a dry voice, humouring him*). And where would you say she is bound for, Mr. Grenfell ?

GRENFELL. A good harbour, a harbour of some nobility. She has had no easy voyage, and in her 'tween-decks there are many sick, in her log-book are written tales of shame and disaster, as well as the narratives of pride. But she carries her canvas still, her masts are tall and her timbers sound, her crew of good heart. It is time for us to go aboard, Scott, or we shall be cried as deserters. And I would not desert from that ship for all the wealth in the world.

SCOTT. Come back, sir ! Bide here, for God's sake, till the sun goes down.

GRENFELL. The sun can do no harm. Hark now : the ship's band is playing on the quarterdeck. Do you recognise the air ? Your cousin played it in a farmhouse in Scotland, on a wilder instrument than fiddles. But it goes well on violins, do you not think ?

SCOTT. You never heard the tune that Alec played. You're havering, man. Come back and lie down in the shade.

GRENFELL. I am going aboard, Scott. — Don't try

## *The Great Ship*

to stop me ! — Presently they will put out a boat for us.  
— Take your hand off me.

SCOTT. You'll be the death of us both.

GRENFELL. If you do not want to come with me, you may stay where you are.

SCOTT. How can I let you go alone, under the top of the sun, and you raving mad ?

GRENFELL. Then we shall march in company again, but we must hurry, Scott. Hurry, hurry !

SCOTT. Take heed, laddie, take heed where you're going. . . .

SECOND NARRATOR. Over the fiery desert Grenfell leads the way, now stumbling wildly, now with the strength of frenzy breaking into a run. Scott is left far behind, but when Grenfell falls, he lies till Scott comes and helps him to his feet. They go forward more slowly.

FIRST NARRATOR. The desert here is less open. Hillocks rise, there are whale-back shapes, and like reefs in the sea, low cliffs break from the ground. And presently from a cliff comes a muffled echo : the echo of gun-fire, not far away.

SECOND NARRATOR. Grenfell and Scott, astonished by the sound, halt and listen. Then they understand, and exultation fills their scarecrow figures. They grow careful then, and though they go on with new purpose and resolution, there is in their movement a soldierly caution.

FIRST NARRATOR. They have come near to the scene of the morning skirmish, where the forward section of Garrick's patrol fought with the German tanks, and destroyed one of them. Garrick now is leaning against the side of the tank with Johnson, the only other man

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alive, lying a-sprawl over his legs.

SECOND NARRATOR. Grenfell and Scott first see the tank from the opening of a little valley about two hundred yards away. They take cover, and look with careful scrutiny at the evidence of battle. They hurry forward, and when Garrick sees them coming, he lifts a revolver, and resting both elbows on the man who lies across his legs, takes careful aim.

GARRICK. Halt, halt ! Who are you ?

GRENFELL. Put up your bright sword or the dew will rust it. We are friends.

SCOTT. It's all right, sir, there's no cause for alarm. We've had a long march in the heat of the sun, and that's all there is to it.

GARRICK. Help me to lift this man. I tried to get him into a more comfortable position, but he collapsed and fell across me. I'm not strong enough to move him. Be careful, my right leg is broken.

GRENFELL. We were in mid-ocean, every stitch of canvas set and drawing, when we heard firing ashore.— There now : another shot !—Another still, and a third !— Where are they fighting ? Who's in command, and what is their strength ?

GARRICK. My Sergeant's over the ridge there, about a mile away. Tell him to hold on. The other tanks went after him. Two of them. Ask him what has happened, and tell him to hold on.

GRENFELL. Have you water here ?

GARRICK. Plenty.

GRENFELL. Give Corporal Scott a drink. He is a good man but lacks vision. Moisten his dull clay, and I shall speak to your Sergeant.

SCOTT. What are you going to say to him ?

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GRENFELL. Tell him to fight : what else ? And keep our great ship on her course. . . .

*The high-roaring tread of a tank is heard in the distance. Then the voices of the soldiers in the trench.*

WILLIAMS. Sergeant, Sergeant ! There's someone talking, and it isn't Mr. Garrick, it isn't Johnson, I don't know who it is.

SENTRY. About a hundred and fifty, and he's stopped again.

WILLIAMS. It's someone with the other section, but he's talking queer. I don't know what he means. It isn't anyone I've ever heard before. It isn't anyone I've ever heard before. . . .

GRENFELL'S VOICE. Nothing shall prevent us. We do not yield, nor take our rest. We must find what we seek, and make what is our purpose to make. Let every man serve with all his strength, a full heart, and the skill of his mind. This is the War of Peace, in which we do not fight for glory or dominion, but fair weather to continue our voyage, and our victory shall be the harbour to a land where men will seek the happiness of truth as though it were the gold of Manoa. Keep safe your great ship, look to your cordage and the guns, and hold your course. We are the voyagers, and the war is the War of Peace. Now in that faith, and in God's name—fight !

## RABELAIS REPLIES

*On the coast of Elysium, a rocky foreland overlooks a bay and a small harbour. Pink thrift and yellow trefoil colour the turf on the flat top of the foreland, and the sea is a glimmer of sunlight and pale blue broken only by a crescent of white water under the southward horn of the bay. On its ocean side the cliff falls sheer, but the landward slope is gentle and a winding path is visible that goes down to the harbour.*

*Lying at their ease on the warm turf are three men ; and near them is an Elysian television-set. One of the three is a familiar figure : FLYING OFFICER ARDEN, who was shot down, in that battle for life in the English sky, in the summer of 1940.*

*Another is an older man. He was once Dean of St. Patrick's. The parsimony that afflicted him in later life has softened into negligence, and his wig, his ecclesiastical gown and bands, though they were never handsome and are not new, are decent enough. His complexion is still liverish, and his habitual expression has in it something of arrogance, something of sourness. But JONATHAN SWIFT, though he had little liking for the mass of humankind, was warm as any man in friendship with a few, and now his affection for ARDEN is plainly to be seen. SWIFT in Elysium, though not much gentler, is on occasion no less cordial than before.*

*The third person is hardly so well known. He too wears clerical dress. He is a tall old man with a long face, a long nose, full pouting lips and big widely-opened eyes. He has a lofty forehead, his double chin settles snugly into his collar, and his grey hair comes curling over his ears. He is BISHOP NIKOLAI GRUNDTVIG, who may be called, without much exaggeration, the creator of modern Denmark. In the middle of*

## *Rabelais Replies*

*last century Denmark was a poor country, straitened by war. Its people were illiterate and depressed, they lay in the doldrums of history. But GRUNDTVIG, with a vision of what might be, gave his country a purpose and devised the machinery that fulfilled it. He and those whom he inspired made their country anew, and Denmark prospered.*

*For some time, without intervening, he listens to SWIFT and ARDEN, but not closely, for he is watching a ship that has rounded the southern horn of the bay and is making towards the harbour with the last of the sea-breeze in her sails. ARDEN too is watching her, and now and then he looks restlessly at the people on the winding path below them, who are going down to the harbour. But SWIFT has no thought for anything but the argument.*

SWIFT. Can you deny that many of those who set themselves up as reformers of the world, became in their own persons a greater nuisance to mankind than the various errors and defects which they proposed to amend ? And this for two reasons : firstly because the reformer, when he has risen to a position of necessary authority, is himself infected by the power that he has seized ; and again because he will find, when he has advanced from the theory of reform to its practice, that of all brutes man is the most unteachable. And so, by a natural aggravation of zeal, the reformer will chastise whom he cannot enlighten ; and having discovered their vice to be incurable, will have some hanged that he promised to heal.

ARDEN. If the world is really as hopeless as that, why did you spend so much time trying to teach and improve your own age ?

SWIFT. I never sought to improve the world, my purpose was only to vex it. Within the compass of

### *Rabelais Replies*

human nature I discovered everywhere such great heaps and accumulation of ignorance and vice, of dirt and disease, that if there had been nothing more I would have hid myself away, and never looked at men again, nor listened to them either, and would certainly have stopped my nose against the smell of them. But there was more. There was, I perceived, a great deal more in human nature than ignorance and vice, than dirt and disease. There was complacency, a strange accompaniment to the others ; and pride, which was an addition so monstrous that I could not forbear from thrusting my stick between the bars, to stir men up a little, and vex them if I could by poking them in tender parts.

ARDEN. But you had friends in England. If human beings are all as stupid and disgusting as you pretend, how did you come to make friends among them ?

SWIFT. I had friends indeed, as many as anyone. Though I hated the animal called Man, I heartily loved John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. You can dote upon the particular even while you detest the generality, there's nothing uncommon in that. But you have been talking about the great bulk and mass of human beings. You say the aggregate is capable of amendment, and can be taught. You say the world is in need of a great reformer who will preach the gospel that men should be educated, not for a trade or academic examination, but for life. For you believe, as you tell me, that a whole people can receive education, and be the better for it.

ARDEN. Yes, I do, and I can tell you why without much difficulty. In your day, in England, there were a few brilliant men and a few hundred learned men. But what were the ordinary people like ?

SWIFT. Brutal. You could indeed distinguish them

### *Rabelais Replies*

from the beasts by their appearance of cunning, their disposition to mischief, and their smaller regard for cleanliness. But in their nature, as it appeared in the most of their habits, they were brutal.

ARDEN. Well, that isn't true to-day. If you're speaking the truth, as I am, there has been a fundamental change in the people of England in about two hundred years ; which, when you think of all history, isn't really a long time. And that change for the better, that general improvement, must be due very largely to education. We've had compulsory education for about sixty years now—

SWIFT. You mean you have driven a great number of poor wretched children into schools, with no more mercy than if they had been cattle bound for the butcher's yard, and taught them to read and write. But when you have taught them how to read, have you taught them what to read ? Having beaten them into acquiring the faculty, have you taken pains to give them a taste for reading what is good ?

ARDEN. But that has to come of itself. You may encourage good taste by setting an example, but I don't think you can enforce it, or cut it to certain measurements like a suit of clothes. You must leave it to nature—

SWIFT. And what you leave to human nature will be corrupted. Give a dog leave to eat filth, and it will eat filth all its life. And are men more backward than dogs in acquiring vicious appetites ? If you give 'em new faculties, which are no more than pieces of machinery, they are more likely, so long as nature rules, to put them to bad use than good. And have you ever thought, my dear Arden, what is the real use of a faculty like reading or writing ? There is more in it than turning a plough-

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boy into a shopkeeper, or making a clerk out of a child that might have been a coal-miner. It is more than a commercial advantage or a social convenience. Those faculties, properly employed, should develop the mind and enrich the character of a man ; and tell me truly, has your compulsory education done that ?

ARDEN. Would you say that resolution is a mark of the developed mind ? If you find, among certain people, an absolute determination to pursue a course that's recognised as the proper course, and yet is immensely difficult and extremely dangerous, would you agree that such people have a mind of their own and a character that's not wholly contemptible ?

SWIFT. Show me the example. You're setting a trap for me, and I must try to spring it.

ARDEN. My example is Britain in 1940. Our determination, then, to go on with the war, was the determination of a whole people. That was a year standing by itself, like the top of a mountain that looks only at the sky and can see nothing else. There was no future to be seen, no future but endurance. And we chose to endure. Not for gain or reward, because there was no prospect of reward, but because all the inheritance of our blood, and all we had learnt with our minds, put up an argument we could not deny. The argument laid in the balance our lives, our single lives, against our general belief — the faith of a whole people and their principles — and showed us which had the greater value. And we accepted the argument, not because we were heroes, but because we were reasonable. So we made our resolve, and 1940 will be like the crest of a mountain lifting through the clouds in our history. You sometimes see when you're flying, rising from the clouds, from a great floor of lamb's wool shining in the upper

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sun, the gleam of something white as any cloud but sharp-edged and hard. It's a mountain with the winter snow still frozen, hard and bright and glittering in the sun. And five hundred years from now the summer of 1940 will look like that, shining with our resolution.

SWIFT. It was a hard choice to make, but a wild beast that has been cornered will do the same, and fight to the death.

ARDEN. A wild beast has neither reason nor imagination. It can't weigh the advantage of surrender against the propriety of fighting ; or imagine the pains of fighting.

SWIFT. And your point is that Britain's resolve to continue the war was the product, not of a natural pugnacity, but of noble reason ? That her determination was born of an educated and thoughtful people, not of mere pride and stubbornness ? That she was brought to bed of this fine purpose by her addiction to good books and high principles ; and pure logic stood by to bless her lying-in ? But if that were indeed a true picture of Britain, would you ever have found yourselves at war ? It is barely five and twenty years ago that Britain emerged the victor from a war that cost her a million dead and with no gain to show for it that anyone can remember. Surely if your people were capable of being taught, if they had the smallest inclination to thought and reason, and therefore to forethought and good judgment, they would have learnt from so fearful a lesson as that ? And if they had learnt anything at all, then faith ! they would have contrived a policy to prevent war and put an end to it for ever.

GRUNDTVIG. Put an end to war ? You have been talking about their failure to do that ? But you must

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not blame them too severely. They called the last war *the war to end war*, and because it has not happened like that, many people have laughed and said they were fools who gave it such a name. But no. Oh, no, no. They were not quite fools, but they were premature. They spoke too soon. The world was not ready for such a lesson.

ARDEN. It wasn't the war, it was people in general that we were talking about.

GRUNDTVIG. I am sorry. I was not attending, for I have been watching the ship come in. They have taken down her sails, she is in harbour now. You can see her bare masts above the cliff.

ARDEN. There are more and more people going down to meet her.

GRUNDTVIG. There are some who always go. Every ship that comes in, they will be there to see who is coming to join us. But not I. No, I like to wait and see them when they are more at ease.

ARDEN. I meant to go this time.

GRUNDTVIG. You are worried about your brother? He is still fighting?

ARDEN. I don't know. He's been in the thick of it all the way across Africa, from Alamein to El Agheila, from Tripoli to the Wadi Akharit, and then I lost sight of him. I've looked for him day after day, but I haven't seen him. We can't see everything, of course, but it is rather worrying.

GRUNDTVIG. You will do yourself no good by standing and waiting at the harbour, pushed this way and that by all those people. No, no. It is better to sit here and talk. What were you talking about?

SWIFT. We have been hunting a hare. Arden started a mad March hare by saying that Man, the great

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unteachable through all the ages, is now become susceptible to education.

GRUNDTVIG. Yes, of course ! He is quite right. Education is our great modern discovery. Nobody knows that better than I, because I founded some schools in Denmark, which have been called the Folk High Schools, and they became the foundation on which all the prosperity and well-being of modern Denmark was built. Of course they did.

SWIFT. It is a pity they did not teach how to guard prosperity as well as build it. There is little left of your Denmark now.

GRUNDTVIG. Education does not alter geography. My schools could not dig an ocean between Denmark and Germany, or create a new Britain to protect us, as Ireland has been protected. But what they did, they did well. Do you know what Denmark was like when I began my teaching ? It was like this : the peasants would talk about two subjects only, first of all the price for which they had sold their cheese and their pigs and their oxen, and very often they told lies and not the truth about that ; and secondly, after they had become a little drunk, they would tell stories about ghosts. They had no other interests. No, no. Nothing but a little money and a lot of nonsense. But my Folk High Schools taught them about their own country, about their own history, and gave them an interest in the source of their life, the value of their life, and its purpose. They became intelligent, and having become intelligent they re-made Denmark and became prosperous. And happy. They were happy too.

ARDEN. Dean Swift has been arguing that the mass of human beings are quite unteachable.

\* GRUNDTVIG. Often, quite often, people have not been

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very wise about education. They have not used the proper methods. You cannot educate little children beyond a certain point, and you can educate nobody who does not want to be educated. First of all you make your pupils desire education, and they cannot do that before they are of an age to think a little bit for themselves. And then you must make quite clear, not only to your pupils but to your teachers, what is the purpose of education.

SWIFT. Faith, I would like to hear that.

GRUNDTVIG. Our Folk High Schools were designed to give education for life. They did not pretend to make farmers or doctors, or cattle dealers or lawyers, or carpenters or bank clerks, but men and women who could live complete and sensible lives in whatever sphere they found themselves. That is the proper way. Of course ! You see, man is two things. He is a person in himself, an individual ; and he is also a member of society. But often a person who is not educated does not realise that, and he is unhappy in consequence. There are many people who are unhappy because they do not feel at home in the world. As individuals they have no roots, and as social beings they do not understand their responsibilities. They do not perceive their place in history. They do not realise that what they are they owe to the past, and therefore they have a debt which they must pay to the future. And to give them this knowledge, history must be the groundwork of education. But not the history of so many history books, which is only the grumbling of very learned men who are displeased with the course of events in the eighteenth century. Oh, no, no ! History is more than that. It is an organic thing. It is a true experience of life on the biggest scale.

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SWIFT. As to the industry of your country, my dear Bishop, I cannot sufficiently admire it. But its reputation of late depended wholly upon its profitable disposal, among the nations, of eggs and butter and bacon. And that, I take it, has been the principal effect of your teaching. But I do not suppose that everybody would regard, as a fully satisfying education for life, a system that enabled them to sell at a good price the produce of their dairies and pigsties.

GRUNDTVIG. You are not being fair. No ! We sold our produce, of course. But before we had any produce to sell we had to make good and wise plans, we had to work hard and with a purpose. Much of our land was marsh and heather and sandy waste, but we made it like a garden, it became rich and fruitful, and that required intelligence. And then, when our intelligence brought money into Denmark, we used it to make our lives more rich and various. It became a good country. We read many books, we lived peacefully but not idly, we had much freedom, and there was justice for all. We cultivated our minds, we sang good songs. . . . What is that ? That is a song I know.

SWIFT. It is an older song than your good songs of Denmark.

ARDEN. There are more people going down to the harbour, to the ship.

GRUNDTVIG. It is Dr. Rabelais. Is it he who is singing ? I did not think he had a voice.

ARDEN. No, it's the man with him. I don't know his name : they call him the Archpoet.

*The singing voice comes nearer : a strong, clear, professional voice. The ARCHPOET is singing the great drinking-song of the Middle Ages, Mihi est*

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propositum. *He and RABELAIS are loitering down the path towards the harbour. The ARCHPOET, a lean and ragged figure in scarecrow finery; RABELAIS in low-crowned cap and fur-edged gown, a stout man, short-bearded with a wide and laughing mouth, but noble eyes and a brow of broad dignity.*

ARCHPOET (*singing*) :

Here is what I now propose — in a tavern I shall die,  
With a glass up to my nose and the bottle standing by,  
So Death's Angel may declare, pouring out my final  
tot,  
' God receive with loving care such a decent drunken  
sot ! '

— And there is the English of it. Every rhymer in Elysium has turned my verses into his own tongue, but none equals the Latin. My words came from the first pressing of the grapes, the others are but the squeezing of the skins and the stalks. But come, Francis, the ship's in harbour, and we are late, late, already late.

RABELAIS. Let us sit on the grass with these gentlemen. — Good morning, good Bishop. Here's better weather than you had in Ireland, Jonathan, you do well to enjoy it. And you, Dick, you're in grave company : I like to see a young man who can be serious once a week. — Let's sit upon the grass and talk, it suits me better than walking in the sun with a long-legged, lank, impatient, scurrying vagabond of a poet who spent all his life running from the constables, and hasn't learnt yet how to be still. Sit down and talk.

ARCHPOET. Not I, Francis. When all Elysium's at the harbour, there's the place for me. I am common flesh, I love the warmth of a crowd. I am bitten by

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curiosity as though my shirt were full of fleas ; which indeed it was, no later than yesterday. Sit and talk if you will, I'd rather crane my neck with the multitude. Your servant, gentlemen ! Farewell, Francis.

*He sings, going down the path ; but the voice becomes quickly smaller and dies in the distance :*

Mihi est propositum in taberna mori,  
Vinum sit appositum morientis ori,  
Ut dicant cum venerint. . . .

RABELAIS. The most impenitent rascal in Elysium, and the story is that he came here by way of the gallows. I do not believe it, nor should you, it is plain slander, but though he escaped hanging I have no doubt he deserved it. And yet how much the poorer we should be without him !

GRUNDTVIG. The poet, the true poet, is God's fellow-worker.

RABELAIS. Whether he is God's fellow-worker or the Devil's, and I have known some with a better claim to that, he is more necessary than yeast to the baker. The bread of human thought would never rise without him. That poet of ours, a knave if ever there was one, would in a single night consume his own substance and that of his neighbour ; make a mock of all virtue and sing for joy where others were snivelling in their grief. He would waste the light of day doing nothing or working evil, and burn the midnight oil for the contriving of a toy. He never laid anything aside for a rainy tomorrow, and gave no more thought to the debts he had incurred yesterday. Nobody could take example from him without coming to ruin, and if you gave him shelter for the night he would steal the sheets to show his grati-

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tude. He went to Church only to escape from the rain, and avoided prison by marrying the gaoler's daughter, whom he left in the lurch for a tavern-keeper's widow when he grew thirsty. But wherever he went he made a new song, sometimes good enough, and when he was in the mood for it he might crack a jest that set old and young laughing so heartily they would burst their seams like peascods ripening in the sun. And therefore he was forgiven, partly upon earth and wholly in Elysium, because laughter is a proper part of life, and of all the animals man alone has the power and desire to laugh.

SWIFT. And often for a very paltry or improper reason. I am heartily glad you have come here, Francis, to give me your help if you will ; for I have been sorely taken to task in argument upon the nature of humankind, of which you know more than I. These gentlemen tell me that man is capable of being educated. I said no, with respect to the majority ; but Bishop Grundtvig then told me of the singular virtues of the state of Denmark, before the Germans obscured them from our view ; and these virtues, for we must believe a Bishop, were all the fruit of certain schools which he established.

GRUNDTVIG. No, no. Not I alone. There were others, many others, who believed as I did, and dedicated their lives to the education of our people.

SWIFT. Let us examine your system more closely, for now, fearing indeed you may have been successful, I begin to fall under a horrible apprehension. Does not your careful system of teaching, and the earnestness with which you doubtless made a practice of it, produce a dullness in the level of accomplishment ? And is that not injurious to our interest, and contrary to nature ? Nature in her work is so lavish with her material that

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she is not concerned for the spoiling of a thousand copies if she may produce a single masterpiece ; and is not then disconcerted though her lonely triumph please no one but herself. Such, for example, is our Archpoet. No well-made plan for educating the majority could ever breed him, or one like him. He is nature's work alone. And yet, on Rabelais' testimony and to our own knowledge, his sort of genius is not only valuable but necessary to a complete and proper world.

GRUNDTVIG. My schools, my Folk High Schools, did not aim at superseding nature. Their purpose was to make use of, and develop, the material that nature provided.

SWIFT. But your aim was to benefit the majority, and in pursuit of that aim did you not exalt the middle kind to the detriment of the more singular and gifted individual ? Did you not set up, as a standard, a standard of serviceable mediocrity ? That is a danger I perceive when men, no matter how good their intentions, propose by their own plan or system to amend the wastefulness of nature.

GRUNDTVIG. You are so wrong, so very wrong — oh, you are so wrong it is nearly impossible to tell you by how much ! You know nothing about our Danish schools. Those horrible results you describe : the exaltation of mediocrity, the repression of genius, the lifting-up like a canal embankment of a dead level — they come only from schools in which the system depends upon examinations, and is governed by examinations, and is designed for the passing of examinations. But I said from the beginning, I said with a loud voice and great determination : All examinations are repellent, and to examine a pupil in what is truly dear to his heart is appalling !

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ARDEN. That's what my brother believes. He's a schoolmaster ; or he was, before he went into the Army.

GRUNDTVIG. Yes, yes, your brother is a good man : I know that. — But you, Dean Swift, it is you who must listen to me. In Denmark when I was a young man — are you listening ? — there were students at the University of Copenhagen, many students, and three-quarters of them could hardly write their own language ; they knew no history except some little stories about a battle or a king ; they thought philosophy was merely a dry subject which they had to pass for their second examination ; and the highest purpose of education, they believed, was to give them a good degree which would bring them a well-paid appointment. And that is the belief, that is the concept of education, against which I fought with all my strength. Education is not a gathering of dead sticks, it is a vital thing. To be worth anything at all, it must prepare young men and women for a life of feeling and experience.

RABELAIS. Then give them words. They cannot make account of their feelings and experience unless they know enough words.

GRUNDTVIG. You are right. You cannot live, like a man who is full-grown should be able to live, unless you know your own language as well as you know the way to your sweetheart's house ; and education must teach you your own language, its songs and its novels, the speech of the common people and the plays of the great dramatists, so that it will seem to every pupil the road to his sweetheart's door. Education is not drudgery, education is pleasure, and for pleasure ! That is what I told all my teachers : they must teach everything so as to give pleasure.

RABELAIS. Would there were more bishops in the

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world whose episcopal temper was like yours, Bishop Grundtvig ! — Take the sour look off your face, Jonathan. He has humbled you, you are soundly beaten. But humility's a Christian virtue, therefore he has put you into a state of grace, and you should rejoice accordingly. — Now I, most dulcet and desirable Bishop, have never been one that looked upon the world as a kind of spacious prison where daily there was some penitential task to be done, and done in time lest the gaoler visit you with cruel displeasure ; but though I have been blessed with a sanguine temperament I have sometimes seen, like boils and grog-blossoms and other blemishes upon a fair complexion, certain faults in the world. And one of them, not the least, is a disposition on the part of many who sit in authority to regard popular enjoyment as a kind of sin, and the disposition to it as a fault that should be eradicated very early in youth. Yet the Creator of the world, like all creators, did his work in pure love and joy, and the morning stars sang in the overflow of his triumph to see completion of his labour. If men are to scheme and devise and plan for their good future, they must do it for joy, in the gladness of the primal act and the furtherance of God's intention. Let them scheme and devise for a full enjoyment of the fruits of time and provenance of the world, for the greater pleasure of all mankind.

ARDEN. That's a good addition to a fashionable programme, Dr. Rabelais. Most of the world is talking about planning for one thing or another, but nobody has been bold enough, so far, to suggest planning for pleasure.

GRUNDTVIG. When I spoke of pleasure I did not mean a perpetual carnival. No, no ! Nor did Rabelais. Pleasure, in my meaning, is the knowledge of freedom,

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the noble use of freedom, and like a relish to your daily bread, the taste of culture.

RABELAIS. The good giant Gargantua, to whom I was a kind of trumpeter, crying attention to his achievements, established an abbey called Thelema, in which those who dwelt there spent all their lives in freedom and pleasure. But those who dwelt there were honest and well-taught, none other was admitted, because Gargantua knew that among men who are not disciplined by honour, freedom too quickly turns licentious ; and among men without knowledge, pleasure may be no more than a gross and brutal indulgence.—I approve your warning, Bishop. You have spoken well again.

SWIFT. If admission to the abbey were indeed so closely scrutinised, I cannot think it was ever much inhabited.

GRUNDTVIG. That depends upon the system of education in Gargantua's kingdom.

RABELAIS. It was a good system, built upon a large belief in the significance of man's life upon earth, and a faith that stood to a multitude of pricks, cunning attack, jibes, deep wounds, and disappointment, in man's virtue and ability. And wherever such a faith was held, I have seen the disappearance of many abuses. Since my time upon earth the world has rid itself of great abuses, and much ignorance.

ARDEN. In the last generation even war has become more intelligent. War is a hateful thing, but when you're driven to war it's as well to use intelligence to finish it. In the last war, strategy went bankrupt. Two armies, grappling in the mud, fought like mastiffs for the outcome : that was all. There were heroes in plenty, endurance that beggars imagination, and fortitude

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tude like the patience of an Atlantic rock ; but strategy and tactics were bankrupt. But in this war, almost from the beginning, there's been intelligence at work. There's a pattern in it. There's a design for victory like an architect's plan. — What's the time ?

RABELAIS. Noon.

ARDEN. Shall we look at the war ? It's time for the survey. We shall see the pattern of it — and perhaps my brother.

*He goes to the television set, turns a switch, and adjusts the dials. The screen is lighted. A view appears of the Tunisian hill country, grassy meadows enamelled brilliantly with flowers, and in the foreground a battery of 25-pounders. The gunners, lean and handy, sinewy men toughened by long campaigning and burnt by the sun, are serving their guns with dexterous speed. In the valley below, spread widely over the flowered grass, a company of infantry is advancing. A COMMENTATOR speaks.*

COMMENTATOR. The steel barrels of those guns were being forged in England when Britain faced the enemy naked and alone. The guns were fashioned, those and many others, and Britain gathered slowly her strength ; her great Allies joined the war. Russia bore the brunt of it for long and desperate months, and America, dividing the oceans of the world, was menaced from either side. Britain, by fierce fighting, kept the sea lanes open. By many battles in the desert and the mountains of East Africa, she held Egypt firm and the road to India. Then she made ready to attack. Those guns, and many others, were loaded into ships — her ships that never left the sea — and the convoys put out on

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their distant voyage. They were four months or five months at sea, they fought against submarines and the enemy's aircraft, by the Cape of Good Hope they carried their guns over twelve thousand miles of salt water to the battle line at Alamein. Eight hundred guns were mustered for the attack. Twelve thousand miles from home an army was gathered and supplied.

Then from the valley of the Nile they fought westward and drove the enemy before them : out of Egypt, through Libya's four hundred leagues of desert, into this ancient corner where Carthage flourished once, and was destroyed. And now another army has crossed the sea, British and American, and the enemy's Carthaginian stronghold is battered from both flanks. His great army of Africa is in a trap ; the Royal Navy and the United Air Forces hold the sea and sky against him.

Now the pattern of the war grows clear. In two great circles the United Nations have enclosed their enemies. From Britain their air fleets are carrying destruction to the vital parts of Germany ; their armies in Africa threaten the sagging paunch of the Fascist powers ; and Russia grimly holds the enormous front where Germany's greatest strength has been deployed.

In the Eastern world, and half a world from home, the Allies have massed in the highlands of Assam another army against Japan. China, marvellous in resource, invincible in resolution, is again advancing down the mountainsides of her great river. In the islands of the Antipodes, in deadly swamp and tangled hills, the soldiers of America and Australia are bruising the python-head of the Japanese assault ; and in the Aleutians, the cold and cloudy islands of the north, the Americans fight through salty storms towards a new advantage. Over all that ocean, from arctic mist and

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hurricane to the sun-dazed beaches and the fever-smell of the Solomons, their navy and their air fleets keep watch upon the enemy, strike harder blows against him. The pattern of the war grows clear, and as it clears it puts on the likeness of another pattern. The pattern . . .

*Suddenly, without warning, the COMMENTATOR is interrupted by a flourish of trumpets. They sound, again and a third time, their clamorous salute.*

GRUNDTVIG. Turn it off. The television-set : turn it off.

ARDEN. I have. — What are they sounding for ?

GRUNDTVIG. It is a welcome to someone who has come ashore. An honourable welcome.

ARDEN. I wonder who it is ?

RABELAIS. They have a broad and catholic appreciation of virtue here. I have heard the trumpets sound for a saintly person of so tender a disposition that he would not kill even the rats that devoured his scanty store in a hard winter ; and also for a General who was the death of some forty thousand of his fellow-men. They have saluted, to their profound surprise, several modest souls who spent all their inconspicuous lives in the service of others ; and a flamboyant artist who considered no one's welfare except his own, but left to the world a score or two of pictures painted in wild colour to unmannerly designs. The trumpets have greeted with an equal fervour both rich and poor, the humble and the proud, the conqueror and his captive and the hermit who never gave a thought either to victory or defeat. The judgment of Elysium is not the world's judgment, and the Sergeant of the Trumpeters——

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ARDEN. There's someone coming up the road.

RABELAIS. The Sergeant of the Trumpeters has hailed with a fanfare many whom the world dismissed with a—

ARDEN. Peter ! It's my brother. Peter !

*Rising in wild haste, then standing for a moment in doubt again, ARDEN runs to meet his brother. Older by ten years, SERGEANT PETER ARDEN is a thick-set man, fair-haired, red-faced and red-armed, though now, with the memory of death close upon him, his high colour is a little faded as though he stood in shadow. He is bare-headed, wearing a khaki shirt and shorts, stained and faded, and he is striding briskly. As he comes nearer you can see, by the set of his jaw and the downward pull of his brows over hard blue eyes, that he is in no good temper. The anger in his voice is hardly muted even while he replies to the intemperate affection of his young brother's greeting.*

SERGEANT. There was a fellow at the harbour who looked like a mediaeval scarecrow ; he said he had just seen you, and I got away as quickly as I could. How long have you been here, Dick ? All the time ?

ARDEN. Yes, ever since 1940. Peter, what happened ?

SERGEANT. I made a fool of myself, and I paid for it. That's all. Who are your friends ?

ARDEN. Bishop Grundtvig ; Dr. Rabelais ; Dean Swift — this is my brother.

RABELAIS. You appear to be out of humour, Sergeant Arden. Are you not pleased to find yourself in our Elysian climate and the comfort of this delectable region ?

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SERGEANT. *Pleased?* I've never been easy to please, but of all the infamous tricks of fortune that ever put me in a vile temper, this is so damnably the worst that I'm tongue-tied by very fury when I think of it. For two years across two thousand miles I've been fighting—do you know anything here of what happens in the world?

ARDEN. Yes, we keep watch.

SERGEANT. You saw the siege of Tobruk? I was there for twenty-four weeks. I was in Benghazi in the winter of that year, and got out in a hurry. I was in the fighting at Knightsbridge, and when Rommel made his last attack north of Himeimat, and we stopped him seventy miles from Alexandria, I was there too. Then we attacked, from Alamein, and in ten days' fighting broke their line, broke them in two, and broke their hearts; and began our march to the west. It was country we knew to begin with, we'd fought back and fore in it, but then we turned the corner to the Gulf of Sirte and took Tripoli. We were looking to the west, marching towards home. We stormed the Mareth Line, and drove our way north into the hill country. There was hard fighting there, but nothing could stop us. By God, we were good! By God, gentlemen, there's never been a finer army in the world! And now, now at the last moment, when our finger-tips were on the final ledge, I've been taken away from them. And you ask me if I'm pleased!

ARDEN. But how did it happen?

SERGEANT. I was a fool, I tell you. I went back to bring in the worst soldier in my company. The fattest and dullest, the only worthless laggard in the whole brigade. We'd taken our position, but he got hit and lay yelling like a lunatic. So I went out for him and brought him in alive, to be patched up and go to some

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other battalion where he'll make himself a dirty everlasting nuisance, as he did to us. And then I took it. I was laying him down, and the sliver of a mortar bomb came in like a sword between my ribs, and I died a fool's death in three minutes or four. If sheep-headed stupidity has newly been made a capital offence, then I'm the first to be condemned for it.

RABELAIS. In Elysium, Sergeant, you will find many good men who have made fools of themselves in that same way.

SERGEANT. That doesn't persuade me to think any better of it.

ARDEN. Peter . . . I wonder if Margaret has heard ?

SERGEANT. How should I know ? There's time enough for her to hear. She's got the rest of her life to remember that she became a widow, with two children to bring up, because I behaved like an idiot boy.

ARDEN. I was luckier than you.

SERGEANT. Yes, it's better to be young and unmarried if you're going to get yourself killed, no matter how good the cause. Your death did no worse than break your mother's heart. But I've broken a growing life and left two children to live in a house from which half the roof and one of the walls has been blown away. I was the shelter they needed, shelter they had a right to expect.

ARDEN. Margaret will do her best for them.

SWIFT. The instinct of self-preservation is well developed in children. The parent may over-esteem his importance to them.

SERGEANT. Were you married ?

ARDEN. Peter — it's Dean Swift.

SWIFT. No, I was not married.

SERGEANT. I beg your pardon. I haven't been

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paying attention. My mind is still too full of the other world. I had no thought of being offensive — but you're wrong, do you see, because a child's instinct of self-preservation may be the ruin of all that's best in him. In order to live a child will adapt himself to any circumstances, like a tree growing on the edge of a cliff, whose roots are thin and tortuous, little greedy roots desperately hungry for soil and water, and its trunk is bent by the wind, and all its branches lean one way to avoid the beating of the wind and the whip of salt spray. A child, if it has to, can grow like that : little and tough and determined, but deformed and frustrated, a travesty of what it might have been. To grow straight, with deep and proper roots and a crown of branches to face the whole sky, a child must have shelter, and soil to give it bulk, and a measured rainfall to put sap in its veins. And I was the shelter that my children had the natural right to demand. It was my part and duty to make a little place of decent earth in which they could grow.

SWIFT. And knowing that you went freely into the Army, being well aware that in time of war a soldier must accept the possibility of being killed ?

SERGEANT. Yes.

SWIFT. We have been talking about education, Sergeant. We have considered it from the simplest point of view, whether man is indeed capable of being taught. Now it seems to me that you have had a lesson which, if human beings are able to learn anything at all, must certainly have taught you something. For your teacher has been the most harsh and compelling of all, that is to say, experience. And the lesson surely is that a man who has begotten children, to whom he feels a natural duty, should by no means adventure his life in battle and take the risk of being killed.

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SERGEANT. I haven't claimed that duty to my children was my only duty.

SWIFT. Do you put the duty of a soldier before the responsibilities of a husband and a parent? Having been neither the one nor the other, I am not prejudiced to either, but by plain matters of fact it is clear where the greater claim must be. For marriage is an honourable estate instituted of God for the procreation of children; but an army is instituted of men for the mere furtherance of some political purpose.

SERGEANT. And if that political purpose includes the making of a world where all children shall be given shelter from tyranny of any kind and the blight of filthy doctrine; shall be given good earth to find their strength in; given promise of a sound and healthy growth — then isn't a soldier who fights for such a world doing a larger duty than a father who has no thought but to keep his own brats warm? Mine isn't the only brood in England, and a father who has learnt to love his own comes by some fantastic alchemy to have a care and regard for childhood itself. My own will suffer because I am dead, but if my death makes a single turf in a new world of security and decent growth for all children, then I've done my duty both as father and soldier. The lout that I threw my life away to save may himself breed a bastard who'll come to something.

GRUNDTVIG. In all the countries of Europe there are so many children who will need help and care. Far more than their parents can give. Children who have been starved and frightened and bewildered: they will need a passionate devotion to heal them of these four years. They will need medical care; physical healing, to begin with, and then education. That must be a long and patient cure.

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SERGEANT. All the world needs education. Men and women as well as children.

GRUNDTVIG. You were a schoolmaster? Your brother has said so. Tell me what subjects you taught, and for what purpose.

SERGEANT. There's only one purpose in education, and that's to develop what a child has in him, by giving information and understanding, so as to make him a living individual capable of enjoying himself as such, and of taking his proper place in a community. As an individual he ought to enjoy life, as a member of a community he must serve it.

GRUNDTVIG. Yes, yes! Education for life! Of course. You must not fill their mouths with sawdust and wipe their noses with examination papers. Tell me, did you teach history and language?

SERGEANT. I had no opportunity of teaching history as I wanted to. I should like to see a school of applied history: history applied to life as mathematics and science have been applied to industry.

GRUNDTVIG. But history will give more than the knowledge of what social and political action you should take to avoid such and such a thing, and ensure some other thing. History, by making the student re-live the stages of national development, of world development, will convince him that he is a growing thing and part of a greater thing that is also growing! Then teach him his own language in such a way that he will learn the spirit of it; not only because words are the principal condition of social life, but for this reason: whenever a man makes one of those lonely journeys into his own mind, or the secret places of his will, he takes with him, like a lamp to explore them, his native language. And so, if he is to see anything, it must be bright and strong.

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RABELAIS. Language, among other things, is an instrument of the senses. Your finger-tips are blunt, and your eyes are blear, and your tongue's a flap of dead rubber that can't taste anything unless you have words to translate what they feel and see and relish, to your understanding. We ought to teach language as an instrument of pleasure.

*A singing voice is heard some distance away ; slowly approaching. The ARCHPOET, returning from the harbour, is singing Dum Diana Vitrea.*

ARDEN. It's the Archpoet again.

ARCHPOET (*singing*) :

When Diana, 'neath her robe,  
From the sun a splint of light  
Brings to fill her crystal globe  
With a flame of silver-white ;  
Whispering across the lift,  
Bidding idle clouds to shift,  
Comes the west wind,  
And the destined  
Lute-player will strike a chord,  
Straight arousing  
Lightly drowsing  
Hearts to seek their own adored.—  
Not until the day-dew lies  
On dock and nettle,  
Dog-rose petal,  
Sleep may close a lover's eyes,  
Not until the dawn shall rise !

— Has your argument been profitable, Francis ?

RABELAIS. You told us, not long since, that you loved

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above all things the warmth of a crowd, but here you come facing the breeze alone. Has the crowd thrown you out and rejected you ?

ARCHPOET. There's other warmth than the heat of a multitude, and I find much to please me. I remembered suddenly, it was a girl's hair tickling my nose that reminded me, that I had promised to meet a little pretty soul this evening some three or four leagues from here. A sad creature, as neat as a mouse, who died of love three hundred years ago when her lover went off to fight in the Wars of Religion that harassed all Europe for a generation. And he, though fighting for religion, so it was said, has never come here ; but she, dying only of love, found her way without stop or difficulty. And now, after waiting so long a time, she is ready for the comfort she deserves. So fare you well, gentlemen ! 'Twill be another fine evening.

*His voice, diminishing as he goes, is heard again, singing the same song :*

Dum Dianaë vitrea  
sero lampas oritur,  
et a fratriis rosea  
luce. . . .

ARDEN. We talk of pleasure, and say that pleasure should be one of the aims of education, but the Archpoet seems to know more about it than any of us.

RABELAIS. Yet he would not be altogether the most profitable and seemly example for your schools ; nor is he always in the meridian of good-humour, but falls between his better seasons into the very pit of melancholy. He is a creature who burns and then goes out, but he has a sensation of life which, if it could be taught

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or made lendable, would greatly enrich the world. I have many times looked down upon the cities of men, so hugely bigger and more thickly peopled than ever I saw in my life, and I have remembered the text, *He hath multiplied the nations and not increased the joy thereof.* And when I look again I think how strange that is, for the world is more richly furnished than ever before. There is comfort where in olden times there was little but cold and darkness ; houses with tight roofs whereas poor men used to see the Great Bear and the Pleiades through gaping thatch ; and fat cattle are killed for beef throughout the year though even rich nobles, some few centuries ago, had little but salt meat for their chewing in winter. And apart from these solid matters the world is so full of toys for the amusement of the idle, that you might say it was a house very generously equipped for pleasure. But look more closely and you will see long faces, a sullen mouth, furrowed brows, envy and doubt, hunger for this and thirst for something else, and fear of nullity in the midst of substance. Therefore, though much has come into the world, other things have gone out, and one of them, I dare say, is that sensation of life which gives the Archpoet his good hours. Can you bring it back by education ? Not to men and women fully grown, I think. You must work upon the children.

GRUNDTVIG. But do not neglect them when they grow into youth. Youth is the decisive period. Education must go on though childhood comes to an end.

SERGEANT. After the last war they filled the country, like an asparagus-bed, with pillars and crosses and stone columns in memory of the men who had been killed. They remembered the dead, for a little while, and forgot, in no time at all, the purpose for which they had died. If they set up memorials this time, let them

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be schools ! Not a stalk of dead marble or unmeaning granite, not tombstones, but schools ! We're dead, and in good company, but we've left our children to the mercy of the world, and we who died for the world ask the world to look after them. Give the children of all nations a Charter of Right. They have their rights : right of shelter and food, of health and joy, of growth and teaching. If our countries hold us in honour, who have fought for them, let them do justice to our children. Let our people go again to Runnymede and draw up a new Great Charter ensuring these rights to my children, and the children of all men, no matter who they are.

SWIFT. Then indeed might I recant. Then indeed might I believe. . . .

ARDEN. The Children's Charter ! Every national policy after the war is going to be suspect. Every one of the victorious nations will be accused of grabbing this, or stealing that, or bird-liming for advantages of one sort or another. But there wouldn't be any taint of self-seeking in a Charter of Rights for all children ; and people work better for an idea.

RABELAIS. There is indeed a strange and remarkable quality in man, that although in his daily life he is commonly ruled by self-interest, he will undertake no great and perdurable task unless it be for the sake of others and in furtherance of some idea.

SWIFT. There is a virtue in man, though most of them hide it and more have lost it.

GRUNDTVIG. He shows his virtue in laughter, which is joy, and his pursuit of ideas, which is aspiration.

RABELAIS. True, Bishop, true. We have all laughed to see little children with the snot upon them, staggering like an old drunkard as they take their first walk abroad ; or stare, besotted, at some common pebble

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and the shell of a snail ; or dabble like ducks at the muddy side of a pool. But those children are already making known their aspirations, which are to freedom and to knowledge ; for that will come, if you let it, from their sense of wonder before all things.

GRUNDTVIG. And children aspire to create.

RABELAIS. To creation also, for their making of mud pies is a kind of activity like the building of a university or a cathedral, differing only in degree. And I say with all my heart that if grown men shall aspire, by way of a proper education, to the furthering of these aspirations of their children, which are like those of God, when he first perceived the qualities of matter and the exquisite plasticity of mud, then a new world will be created ; and it may be a better one.

GRUNDTVIG. Of course !

RABELAIS. I have seen many soldiers here, from many wars, and heard from not a few what terms of peace they would have imposed if they had but lived a little longer. But by all the fatness of earth and the benison of the sky — which, among other things, make the juice of the grape, of which I have drunk so much that it's past all ordinary calculation to measure it — I swear to you, Sergeant, that never have I heard a better, more wise and profitable, more politic and Christian a treaty than one that should embody, among whatever clauses and codicils, terms and provisions may be necessary, a guarantee that soldiers' children shall be the beneficiaries of their fathers' valour. I say with you, let them be given what you in England were given at Runnymede, a charter of rights and justice : a Great Charter of the Children !

THE END

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